



## Courageous Leadership: 10 Simple Habits

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January 20, 2021

Thomas Bloom Raskin was an extraordinary young man. At 25, he was a teaching assistant at Harvard Law School who donated from his teaching salary to charities in his students' names. He had already interned at the Cato Institute and J Street, among other prominent organizations. A passionate vegan and outspoken animal rights activist, Thomas' essays were published in *The Nation* and elsewhere.

Thomas was exceptional.

*Tommy was remarkable from the beginning, Jamie Raskin, his dad, a member of the US House of Representatives from Maryland, tells NPR's Scott Simon (Weekend Edition, 1/9/21). But it wasn't his mind that marked him as so extraordinary. It was his heart. The stories of his love and compassion are absolutely astounding.*

Thomas also faced an often unyielding depression throughout much of his early 20s. On New Year's Eve, Thomas Bloom Raskin took his life.

When Jamie Raskin stood up to speak on January 6, during the congressional debate that unsuccessfully sought to overturn Joe Biden's electoral win, he received a standing ovation. This was the day after Jamie Raskin had buried his son. The day the US Capitol was invaded by a seditious mob.

*It has been a solace and a comfort to me that at this time of the ugliest possible division, Raskin tells NPR, there is still enough decency and humanity that we can share each other's pain in this situation.*

I have a brother who committed suicide. This story has touched me in a very personal way.

It must have taken courage for Jamie Raskin to show up on January 6. His presence was an act of courageous leadership. And the courage was understood by his peers.

*Courage, says Merriam Webster, is the mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.*

I think of the many different faces of courage. I think of Martin Luther King Jr. whose birthday we celebrate this week. I think of the police officers who faced a violent mob on January 6. And I think of you and me.

**“The most courageous act is still to think for yourself. Aloud. “**

Coco Channel

How can you and I show up with courage every single day? What does courageous leadership look like when we don't face an imminent danger and our lives are not at stake?

I am partial to Brene Brown's twist on the meaning of courage. Brown is the revered author of "Dare to Lead" and many other books on living courageously.

*We typically associate courage with heroic and brave deeds, Brown explains. But in my opinion, this definition fails to recognize the inner strength and level of commitment required for us to actually speak honestly and openly about who we are and about our experiences – good and bad. Speaking from our hearts is what I think of as "ordinary courage."*

The root of the word *courage* is the Latin word *cor* – heart. It is the source of ordinary courage. At its finest, courageous leadership is always connected to our hearts. Here are some specific examples of what courageous leadership looks like.

### **Examples of Courageous Leadership**

- I fearlessly suggest new ideas even when I am not sure folks are eager to hear them.
- I admit when I am wrong. Every time. I do so without explaining my wrongness away.
- I choose to change course when something isn't working. I don't hide mistakes and I don't try to fool others.
- I don't act fake-smart. I admit when I don't know something.
- I support a colleague who is not popular when I believe in this colleague's talents, skills and contributions.
- I challenge my teams when we peddle in excuses for our failures.
- I strive for collective betterment without making others wrong.
- I persevere when a suggestion or idea I strongly believe in doesn't get traction right away.
- I affirm that under exceptional circumstances, my physical fortitude will support my commitments.
- I hold the moral high ground when folks around me wish to take unethical shortcuts.

Do all of this without becoming a self-righteous jerk or coupling your courage with a constant need to battle others. Don't confuse having courage with getting your way. Don't succumb to grandiosity or specialties.

Know when to stop.

I delivered the eulogy at my brother Thomas' funeral. When I do a little "courage scan" of courageous acts in my life, delivering this eulogy rises to the top. I was still in shock the day my brother was buried. I was worried about speaking in German, my rusty mother tongue. I didn't wish to be the voice of my entire family. I simply didn't think I could do it.

Of course I could. Courage helped me ride the wave.

Thomas Bloom Raskin lived courageously. Jamie Raskin will be one of 9 Impeachment Managers in the Senate Trial of the departing US President. Will it take courage and inner strength? Sure. Will he be able to do it? Sure.

Courage will help Jamie Raskin ride the wave.

Consider your own everyday behaviors. Consider the leadership habits outlined above. And have the courage to claim your courage.

Be clear. The world needs your courageous leadership. Come ride the wave with us.